

The School of Agriculture

1885 • 1905

by

Harvey W. MacPhee

Published By: The Nova Scotia Agricultural College
May 1985

Distributed By: The N.S.A.C. Bookstore
P.O. Box 550
Truro, N.S.
B2N 5E3

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Harvey W. MacPhee retired from the Nova Scotia Teachers College, where he was Professor of History for twenty-two years, in 1983. Prior to that he taught History and Social Studies in the provincial public school system. His formal studies led to a Superior First Rank Diploma (N.S. Normal Coll.), a B.A. (Dal.), where he earned a distinction in History, a M.A. in History (Dal.), and courses at Columbia University in the doctoral program. He continues to contribute to education and local history projects through his present work as curator of The Little White School House and as Vice-President of the Colchester Historical Society.

PHOTOGRAPHS:

From the Agricola Collection, N.S.A.C. Library.

THE SCHOOL OF AGRICULTURE

Truro, Nova Scotia
by Harvey W. MacPhee

It would be presumptuous of anyone to write a story of School of Agriculture without stating that he could not improve on Dr. Kenneth Cox's **History of the Nova Scotia Agricultural College (Truro, 1965 & 1971)**, but it might be possible to add some details. Dr. Cox was interested in the School as a forerunner of the Agricultural College not as an entity itself. There are at least two aspects of the story which still need a great deal of investigation. They are the relationship with the Normal School and the career of Professor H.W. Smith. These deserve special articles in themselves but we may, from time to time, see glimpses of them as we proceed.

Mr. David Allison, Superintendent of Education, in his **Report of 1885**, listed the faculty of the Normal School. J.B. Calkin, M.S., was the Principal and Professor of Didactics and Chemistry and H.W. Smith, B.Sc., was listed as Lecturer in Natural Science. (Professor Smith was listed for the first time in 1885). Dr. Allison also reported to Lieutenant Governor Richey that as the result of the passing of "An Act to encourage Agricultural Education" (48 Vic. Chap. 22 was passed 24th April 1885) certain changes and additions to the responsibilities of the Council of Public Instruction had come about.

Under the terms of the Act, the Council of Public Instruction had the power and the responsibility to appoint a Lecturer on Agriculture in connection with the Provincial Normal School. The lecturer's task was a difficult one and his duties were many. He was appointed to instruct the pupil-teachers in Agricultural Chemistry and Sciences bearing on agriculture, "conduct classes with the view of training teachers for the special schools provided for in this Act," inspect any schools receiving special grants under the Act and deliver public lectures on agriculture throughout the Province.

Young farmers and others who were not teachers or teachers-in-training could attend these courses, though it appeared that, at least for some time, the students were male pupil-teachers or male teachers who returned for the purpose of attending classes under the Lecturer or, as was said, at the School.

Male teachers of the first class (A and B) could qualify for a special grant of one hundred dollars when teaching school under the terms of the Act after having completed the course of lectures and passed an examination.

To encourage teachers to qualify themselves as agricultural instructors, \$250 was to be distributed annually as prizes "among the five teachers who shall pass the best examination on the subjects of the course."

Moneys paid out under this Act were to come from the Education Budget!

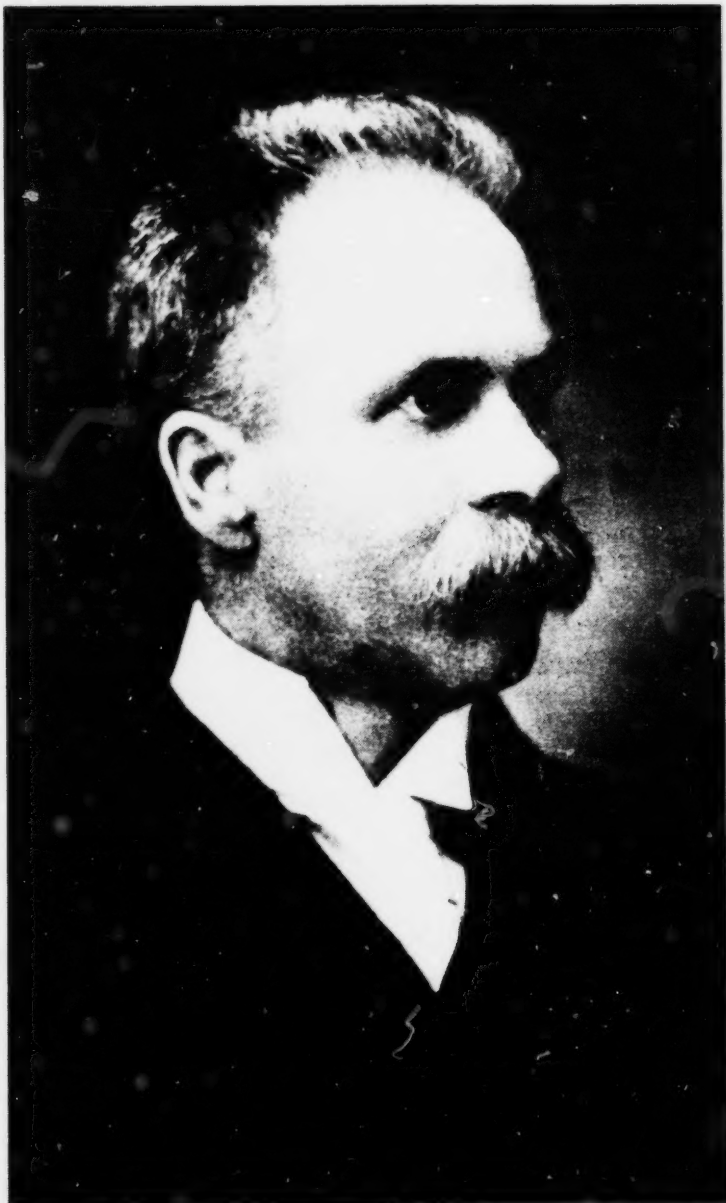
The man chosen as Lecturer on Agriculture was H.W. Smith, B.Sc., of Cornell University, Ithaca, New York. Professor Smith was a young man of twenty-five who would devote the next thirty-nine years of his life to his adopted province and the cause of agriculture in Nova Scotia.

Professor Smith presented to the Superintendent a course of study under three general heading:

1. Natural Sciences - Botany, Anatomy & Physiology
2. Their application to agriculture
3. Practical agriculture

Among the texts he recommended were Gray's Physiology, Bessey's Botany, Chanveaux's Anatomy, Green's Pathology, Law's Veterinary and Johnson's "How Crops Grow and Feed."

A room was provided at the Normal School (now the YMCA building) for the School. Professor Smith had seven students during the first year in the agricultural course. Two of these, G.B. McGill of Clementsport and J.W.H. King, graduated in July, 1886.



PROFESSOR H.W. SMITH

Dr. Allison reported that three would graduate as teachers with diplomas in Agriculture in July 1887 and he expressed his pleasure in stating that Sir William Young, the son of "Agricola" (John Young), had offered one hundred dollars in prizes for School graduates.

The number of those taking the Course and the number graduated does not appear very large during these early years. Professor Smith was aware of this. In his **Report** of 1888, he reported to Dr. Lawson, Secretary for Agriculture, that he had thirty applications from all parts of the Province. These candidates would attend if there were a farm in connection with the School. Once again he advocated the acquisition of a farm, so that more "practical work" could be accomplished. It would also allow some students to work in order to pay expenses and, by making the school work more efficient, it would increase attendance.

Although the number of students in the School was not large, Professor Smith had not been idle during the past year. He had taught his classes at the Normal, classes at the School, delivered forty lectures in various parts of the Province and initiated the formation of a Farmers' Association in Colchester County.

How thrilled and happy Professor Smith must have been when as a result of his appeals, and the support of his admirers, it was decided to purchase a farm.

In the **Journal of the House of Assembly 1889**, one paragraph in capital letters was headed **Purchase of the Agricultural School Farm.**

The Secretary for Agriculture, Dr. Lawson, reported that he had attended the annual meeting of the Royal Society in Ottawa in May 1888. He had been requested by the Provincial Secretary to visit the Dominion Central Experimental Farm in that city, the Ontario Agricultural College at Guelph, Ontario and the Secretary for Agriculture in Quebec. He was to seek advice on the buying and operation of property as a school farm.

Dr. Lawson was very well received, especially in Quebec Province where the Members of the Legislature spared no

pains in assisting him.

In July, 1888, Dr. Lawson and Professor Smith visited several properties in Bible Hill, near Truro, in order to inspect certain properties recommended by Professor Smith to the Government.

A plan was prepared by James H. Austin, Chief Clerk of the Crown Land Department from a survey made by him and accompanied Dr. Lawson's report.

Professor Smith supplied a description of the properties as well - these lands were owned by four parties, Edward Blanchard, L.B. Crowe, C.P. Blanchard and the Rev. Dr. McCulloch. The farm made up a total of 103 or 104 acres; 30 acres of woods, 20 acres of intervale and 53 acres cleared upland.

"This is about the right size for our purpose as it is desirable to make the farm as small as possible and yet is large enough to fulfill all our needs."

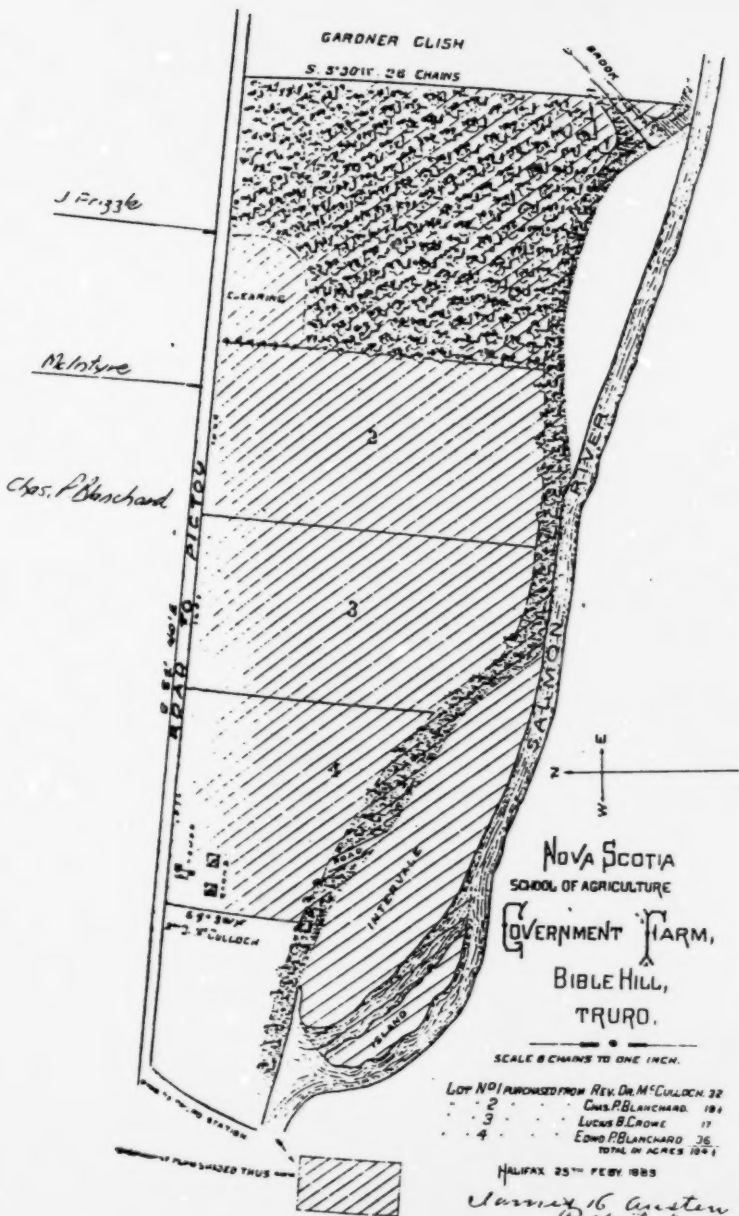
(J.H.A., 1889, App. 8, p. 40)

The farm was bounded on the west by the land and residence of the Rev. Dr. McCulloch, on the north by the Old Pictou Road (College Road), on the east by lands owned by William Frizzell and on the south by the Salmon River.

Professor Smith stated that it would not be essentially an experimental farm nor a "model" farm, but would be used to instruct the pupils in the best methods of farming and to teach the principles of agriculture.

The management of the Farm appeared to be a rather different arrangement! It was based upon the practices at the Royal Agricultural College of England at Cirencester, Gloucester County.

The Government of Nova Scotia agreed to put the property in proper repair and gave Professor Smith possession and entire control of the farm, he paying for the first year \$250.00, the second year \$300.00, and for each succeeding year \$350.00.



PLAN OF FARM: February 1889

Smith was to furnish all the stock, capital and implements to carry on the farm. All produce was to belong to him. This agreement was to continue in force for four years from the first day of April, 1889.

This agreement was made by the Hon. W.S. Fielding on behalf of the Government of Nova Scotia with Professor Smith.

After the acquisition of the Farm, the work of the School of Agriculture conformed more to the ideas and goals of H.W. Smith as Principal of the School. The rift between the agricultural students and the Normal School students widened and though he continued his work at the Normal until 1905, his heart and home were in Bible Hill.

He reported in 1889 that nine counties were represented among his twelve students. Five of the students were 30 years of age or over, five under 20. Three of the group were married men and nearly all were sons of farmers.

The work of the Farm was done by the students who were paid by the hour for their work. They could earn from six to ten dollars per month during the winter and from twelve to twenty dollars per month during the summer.

Mr. Smith was advanced in more than his agricultural ideas, for in 1889 he advocated the admission of women to the School of Agriculture. He stated that in England where women were admitted there were almost always more women than men.

In 1891, he probably shocked the academics by stating that the School should be open to any young men who had but limited time to attend school and who wished to get as much instruction and insight into intelligent farming as they could.

"Any young man can enter the school who has a good moral character and a fair common school education."

This was not a new requirement for admission but Smith was an ardent advocate of giving the advantages of scientific agriculture to farmers and farmers' sons rather than just the professional

teachers.

There were still two classes of students: certificate and diploma. Those with common school education could gain certificates on completion of the courses of their choice and could progress from certificate to certificate without penalty while a teacher who possessed on graduation an A or B License, would receive a Teacher's Diploma.

Teachers could compete for the \$50 prizes and would receive \$100 additional to their salary each year and all students could work up to thirty-five hours on the Farm. Many "certificate" students could earn a fair amount by practical work.

The library of the School housed at the Normal School, had one hundred and fifty bound volumes and about as many unbound. The following papers were obtained by subscription.

Farmers' Advocate
Country Gentlemen
Rural New Yorker
Eng. Agr. Gazette
Chemical News
American Chemical Journal
Biedermann's Centralblatt for Agriculturchmie
Kersuch's Station
Journal for Landwirthschaft
Garden and Forest
Scientific American Supplement
Agricultural Science
American Naturalist
Entomologist (London)
Canada Entomologists
Canadian Livestock Journal
National Livestock Journal, etc.

By 1891, the program of studies consisted of two years' study during four terms each year.

COURSE OF STUDY.

FIRST YEAR.	IN CHEMISTRY.	IN BOTANY.	IN VETERINARY.	IN OTHER SCIENCE.	IN AGR. INCT.	IN AGRICULTURAL PRACTICE.
FALL TERM.....	Introductory.	Structural; Microscopy.	Hygiene.	Geology.	Implements.	Implements. Carpentry. Blacksmithing.
WINTER TERM.....	General.	Anatomy of Plant.	Anatomy of Dom. Animals.	Geology.	Buildings.	Horticulture.
SPRING TERM.....	Qualitative Analysis.	Physiology of Plants.	Anatomy.	Invertebrate Zoology.	The Soil.	Small and Large Fruits.
SUMMER TERM.....	Organic.	Algae and Fungi.	Physiology.	Entomology.	The Plant.	Improvements.
SECOND YEAR.						
FALL TERM.....	Agricultural Quantitative Analysis.	Fungi.	Histology.	Entomology.	The Animal.	Pigs. Poultry. Horses. Cattle.
WINTER TERM.....	Same as Fall.	Agricultural.	General Pathology.	Vertebrate Zoology.	Atmosphere and Water.	Dairy. Apiary.
SPRING TERM.....	•	Systematic. Gramineae and Compositae.	Materia Medica.	•	Manure.	•
SUMMER TERM.....	•		Special Pathology.	•	•	•

FROM SCHOOL OF AGRICULTURE CALENDAR: 1891

In 1892, a new laboratory building was erected on the Farm grounds. Dr. Cox gives a very full and excellent description of this in his **History** (see pp. 133-135).

Unfortunately, this building was destroyed by fire on March 31, 1898.

Professor Smith found room for his Normal School classes and some of his books in the Masonic Building on the corner of Queen and Revere Streets. He tried to carry on some of his classes at the Farm in barns until the weather became so cold that it was impossible; consequently, classes were sporadic and difficult until a new building was acquired.

The loss of the Farm building along with increased attendance and growing needs of the Normal School, led to the erection and equipping of a building to serve the scientific requirements of the two schools.

This building, located on the western side of the Normal School grounds (now the Colchester Historical Museum), was opened for school purposes in the autumn of 1901. It very adequately served the immediate needs of the Agricultural School and those of the Provincial Normal School and College until the early 1960's.

The Dairy Barn was erected in 1896 and the Judging Pavilion in 1903.

Until 1905 and the creation of the Agricultural College, the School of Agriculture and the Provincial Normal School developed side by side.

In the **Journal of the House of Assembly** some of the graduates of the School of Agriculture with their residences and occupations in 1891 are listed as:

1886: G.B. McGill, Annapolis Co., one of the first prize winners, Teacher and Farmer.

J.W.H. King, British Columbia, another prize winner, Teacher.

1887: G.R. Marshall, Kings Co., Teacher and Student.

A.A. Dechman, Cumberland Co., Teacher and Student.

A.A. King, Colchester Co., Farmer.

1888: J.W. Edwards, Cape Breton, Teacher and Farmer.

1889: H.L. Cook, Lunenburg, Teacher and Merchant.

Sidney Clark, Colchester Co., Farmer and Supt. of the Provincial Government Farm and Student at the School.

J.C. Blair, Colchester Co., Farmer and Student.

1890: T.L. Fuller, Cumberland Co., Farmer and Assistant at the Maritime Experimental Station, Nappan. (Farm Manager at the School (College), Agriculturalist in the original faculty of the College and Superintendent of Agricultural Societies and Associations for the Province of Nova Scotia, strong advocate of the appointment of Dr. Cumming as first principal of the College according to Dr. Cox.)

E.L. Moore, Colchester Co., Farmer and Student at the School.

J.D. McKinnon, Cape Breton, Farmer and Teacher.

W.H. Maxwell, London, England, Student.

John M. Trueman, second Principal of the Agricultural College, was a graduate of the School of Agriculture in 1891.

In 1903, Loran A. Dewolfe, M.S., of West Gore and his wife attended the special Summer Courses for Teachers at the School of Agriculture under the Principalship of Prof. H.W. Smith. Dr. Dewolfe became Director of the Rural Science School at the Normal School and Director of the Rural Education Division of the N.S. Dept. of Education.

The creation of the N.S. Agricultural College in 1905 was the culmination of plans outlined by Sir. J.W. Dawson and Dr. Alexander Forrester. "Dr. David Allison expressed the idea in concrete form when starting the School of Agriculture in 1885 " (Cox, p. 24).

As Dr. Cox wrote, the School had its critics, but the contributions made by Professor Smith and his graduates cannot be refuted.

We mentioned some of his graduates, but we should end by paying particular tribute once again to Professor H.W. Smith.

At what we might call a tender age, 25, he undertook an almost impossible task. He seems to have been almost ignored by some of the academics, yet he worked almost alone for twenty years to give agriculture the status of a science in Nova Scotia. After the creation of the Agricultural College, he worked as Professor of Botany for many more years. In all he devoted 39 years of his life to the business of agriculture in this province.

He was an innovator and an indefatigable worker. As late as 1921 he reported to Principal Cumming that he was conducting four distinct classes consisting of:

1. Regular College Students
2. Senior and Junior Classes
3. The Rural Science Teachers in Plant Diseases
4. Officers of the Fish Hatcheries for Eastern Canada: an entirely new course in our institution, such a course never before having been given in the Dominion to fishery officers. It comprises a study of Plant and Animal Life, especially those forms common to fresh water streams, a study of the structure and life history of fish and the fundamental principles of Biology.

After 36 years, H.W. Smith was still introducing new courses and new ideas.

Congratulations to the Nova Scotia Agricultural College on
the centenary of its origin in the School of Agriculture.

Harvey W. MacPhee

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